

DHHS Reports State's First Death This Year Related to West Nile Virus

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State health officials are encouraging residents and visitors to take precautions to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses following the death of a North Carolina resident from West Nile virus infection last week. This is the state's first death from and first confirmed case of West Nile virus in 2018.

The individual was an adult living in the southeastern part of the state. To protect patient confidentiality, the department is not releasing additional details.

"These infections are rare, but this is a tragic reminder that they can be fatal," said State Public Health Veterinarian Carl Williams. "We see most cases of West Nile virus from July through November, but you can still enjoy the outdoors by reducing mosquito populations around your home and through proper use of repellents."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most people who become infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or a mild, flu-like illness. However, about 20 percent of people who are infected will develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea or rash. In about 1 percent of infections, West Nile virus can cause a severe illness affecting the central nervous system, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord).

West Nile virus is one of several mosquito-borne viruses that can be acquired in North Carolina. Other mosquito-borne viruses transmitted in the state that cause human illness include LaCrosse and Eastern equine encephalitis viruses. From 2012-2017, there were 25 reported cases of West Nile virus in the state and seven reported deaths.

There are no West Nile vaccines licensed for use in humans, and no medications to cure West Nile disease once a person is infected by a mosquito.

DHHS recommends the following precautions:

- Use an EPA-registered mosquito repellent and apply according the manufacturer's instructions.
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes outside, and if possible, use air conditioning.
- Reduce mosquito breeding by emptying standing water from flowerpots, gutters, buckets, pool covers, pet water dishes, discarded tires and birdbaths at least once a week.

More information on the prevention of mosquito bites is available on the [Division of Public Health's website](#) and [through the CDC](#).